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CONTENTS OF VOL. XXXVI

	PAGE
CARNOT. By *Algernon Charles Swinburne*	1
THE FAILURE OF THE LABOUR COMMISSION. By *Mrs. Sidney Webb*	2
THE PARTITION OF AFRICA. (*With a Political Map.*) By *A. Silva White*	23
DELUSIONS ABOUT TROPICAL CULTIVATION. By *Sir William Des Voeux*	33
RELIGION IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS. By *J. G. Fitch*	55
A NIGHT IN INDIA. By *Mrs. Logan*	71
THE 'VIRGIN OF THE ROCKS.' By *Sir Frederic W. Burton*	79
COMPETITIVE EXAMINATIONS IN CHINA. By *T. L. Bullock*	87
PROPOSED OVERTHROW OF THE CHURCH IN WALES. By *Lewis T. Dibdin*	100
THE ART OF DYING. By *Miss I. A. Taylor*	111
COLLEGE DISCIPLINE. By *L. A. Selby-Bigge*	126
A LAND OF INCREDIBLE BARBARITY. By the *Earl of Meath*	127
THE CENTENARY OF EDWARD GIBBON. By *Frederic Harrison*	146
THE PLACE OF HERESY AND SCHISM IN THE MODERN CHRISTIAN CHURCH. By *W. E. Gladstone*	157
THE ITALIAN CASE AGAINST FRANCE. By *Cav. W. L. Alden*	175
MUTUAL AID IN THE MEDIÆVAL CITY. By *Prince Kropotkin*	183, 397
THE FARCE OF 'UNIVERSITY EXTENSION.' By *Charles Whibley*	203
BEHIND THE SCENES OF NATURE. By *A. P. Sinnett*	211
A PART OF A GHOST. By *Dr. W. H. Russell*	222
THE WAR-CHESTS OF EUROPE. By *Professor Geffcken*	230
IN THE TABUMENSIAN WOODS. By *R. B. Cunninghame Graham*	244
DEATH AND TWO FRIENDS: A DIALOGUE. By *Richard Le Gallienne*	253
THE LABOUR WAR IN THE UNITED STATES. By *J. S. Jeans*	259
THE PRESENT POSITION OF EGYPTOLOGY. By *Professor Mahaffy*	268
FACTS FROM BIHAR ABOUT THE MUD-DAUBING. By *W. Egerton*	279
SOME PICTURES AND THEIR PRICES. By *W. Roberts*	286
IS OUR RACE DEGENERATING? By *Hugh Percy Dunn*	301
DELPHIC HYMN TO APOLLO. Translated by *Algernon Charles Swinburne*	315
TRUE AND FALSE CONCEPTIONS OF THE ATONEMENT. By *W. E. Gladstone*	317
HERESY AND SCHISM FROM ANOTHER POINT OF VIEW. By *Dr. Vance Smith*	332
OUR WARNING FROM THE NAVAL MANŒUVRES. By *William Laird Clowes*	341
'KNOWN TO THE POLICE.' By *Edmund R. Spearman*	366
THE FACTS ABOUT UNIVERSITY EXTENSION:	
1. By *M. E. Sadler*	371
2. By *Mrs. James Stuart*	383
SMOKE. By *Mrs. Frederic Harrison*	389
THE HADRAMUT: A JOURNEY IN SOUTHERN ARABIA. By *J. Theodore Bent*	419
THE GOLD QUESTION: AN APPEAL TO MONOMETALLISTS. By *J. P. Heseltine*	433
MRS. SIDNEY WEBB'S ATTACK ON THE LABOUR COMMISSION. By *Geoffrey Drage*	452
THE PARISH PRIEST IN ENGLAND BEFORE THE REFORMATION. By the *Rev. Dr. Jessopp*	468
THE SEVEN LORD ROSEBERIES. By *St. Loe Strachey*	489
WAGNER AT BAYREUTH. By the *Countess of Galloway*	507

PAGE

THE ALLEGED SOJOURN OF CHRIST IN INDIA. By *Professor Max Müller* . 515
ENGLISH ART CONNOISSEURSHIP AND COLLECTING. By *Sir Charles Robinson* . 523
CHOLERA AND THE SULTAN. By *Ernest Hart* . 538
DID OMAR DESTROY THE ALEXANDRIAN LIBRARY? By *R. Vasudeva Rao* 555
A DIALOGUE ON DRESS. By the *Hon. Mrs. Chapman* . 572
A SCOTTISH VENDETTA. By *Sir Herbert Maxwell* . 583
THE FARCE OF UNIVERSITY EXTENSION: A REJOINDER. By *Charles Whibley* . 593
A SUGGESTION TO SABBATH-KEEPERS. By *Professor Alfred R. Wallace* 604
THE CHINAMAN ABROAD. By *Edmund Mitchell* . 612
A TRIP TO BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA. By *Mons. de Blowitz* . 621
THE PERILOUS GROWTH OF INDIAN STATE EXPENDITURE. By *Sir Auckland Colvin* . 645
NOTE FROM MR. GLADSTONE . 664
WHAT HAS BECOME OF HOME RULE? By *J. E. Redmond* . 665
ENGLAND AND THE COMING THUNDERSTORM: A GERMAN VIEW. By *Dr. Felix Boh* . 678
CHRISTIAN SOCIALISM. By the *Duke of Argyll* . 690
THE PARLIAMENTS OF THE WORLD. By *J. Taylor Kay* . 708
THE PRESS IN TURKEY. By *H. Anthony Salmone* . 716
BABIES AND MONKEYS. By *S. S. Buckman* . 727
THE PEOPLE'S KITCHENS IN VIENNA. By *Edith Sellers* . 744
MORE LIGHT ON ANTONIO PEREZ. By *Major Martin A. S. Hume* . 754
THE MONOMETALIST CREED: A REPLY TO A CHALLENGE. By *Henry Dunning MacLeod* . 770
THE CORFAN CRUX: A WORD FOR CHINA. By *Demetrius C. Boulger* . 781
NONCONFORMIST FOREBODINGS. By the *Rev. J. Guinness Rogers* . 790
FRUIT RANCHING. By *A. C. Twist* . 807
THE BIBLE IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS. By *J. G. Fitch* . 817
'JUSTICE TO ENGLAND!' A RALLYING CRY. By *Edward Dicey* . 824
LORD ROSEBERY'S ENTERPRISE AGAINST THE HOUSE OF LORDS. By *L. A. Atherley Jones* . 837
IF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS WERE ABOLISHED? By *Sidney Low* . 846
ABOUT THAT SKELETON. By *H. D. Traill* . 864
CRIMINAL AND PRISON REFORM. By *Michael Davitt* . 875
WHY I AM NOT AN AGNOSTIC. By *Professor Max Müller* . 890
THE ESTATE DUTY AND THE ROAD ROUND IT. By *A. H. Hastie* . 896
THE MUSIC OF JAPAN. (*With Examples*) By *Miss Laura Alexandrine Smith* . 900
NEW SOURCES OF ELECTRIC POWER:
1. Electric Energy direct from the Coal-fields. By *B. H. Thwaite* . 919
2. Electricity from Peat. By *J. Munro* . 927
THE DECAY OF BOOKSELLING. By *David Stott* . 932
WANTED, AN IMPERIAL CONFERENCE. By *Sir John Colomb* . 939
HOW TO MULTIPLY SMALL HOLDINGS. By *Lord Carrington* and *Harold E. Moore* . 947
LORD BACON *versus* PROFESSOR HUXLEY. By the *Duke of Argyll* . 959
THE CRY AGAINST HOME WORK. By *Miss Ada Heather-Bigg* . 970
RECENT SCIENCE. (Diphtheria—Earthquakes—Flying-Machines.) By *Prince Kropotkin* . 987
TO A BABY KINSWOMAN. By *Algernon Charles Swinburne* . 1008

THE ALLEGED SOJOURN OF CHRIST IN INDIA[1]

ÆNEAS SYLVIUS, afterwards Pope Pius the Second, 1458–64, when on a visit to England, was anxious to see with his own eyes the barnacle geese that were reported to grow on trees, and, being supposed to be vegetable rather than animal, were allowed to be eaten during Lent. He went as far as Scotland to see them, but when arrived there he was told that he must go further, to the Orchades, if he wished to see these miraculous geese. He seemed rather provoked at this, and, complaining that miracles would always flee further and further, he gave up his goose chase (*didicimus miracula semper remotius fugere*).

Since his time, the number of countries in which miracles and mysteries could find a safe hiding-place has been much reduced. If there were a single barnacle goose left in the Orchades, i.e. the Orkney Islands, tourists would by this time have given a good account of it. There are few countries left now beyond the reach of steamers or railways, and if there is a spot never trodden by a European foot, that is the very spot which is sure to be fixed upon by some adventurous members of the Alpine Club for their next expedition. Even Central Asia and Central Africa are no longer safe, and hence, no doubt, the great charm which attaches to a country like Tibet, now almost the only country some parts of which are still closed against European explorers. It was in Tibet, therefore, that Madame Blavatsky met her Mahâtmas, who initiated her in the mysteries of Esoteric Buddhism. Mr. Sinnet claims to have followed in her footsteps, but has never described his or her route. Of course, if Madame Blavatsky and Mr. Sinnet had only told us by what passes they entered Tibet from India, at what stations they halted, and in what language they communicated with the Mahâtmas, it would not be courteous to ask any further questions. That there are Mahâtmas in India and Tibet no one would venture to deny. The only doubt is whether these real Mahâtmas know, or profess to know, anything beyond what they can, and what we can, learn from their sacred literature. If so, they have only to give the authorities to which they appeal for their esoteric knowledge, and we shall know at

[1] Nicolas Notovitch, *La Vie inconnue de Jésus-Christ*. (Paris, 1894.)

once whether they are right or wrong. Their Sacred Canon is accessible to us as it is to them, and we could, therefore, very easily come to an understanding with them as to what they mean by Esoteric Buddhism. Their Sacred Canon exists in Sanskrit, in Chinese, and in Tibetan, and no Sacred Canon is so large and has at the same time been so minutely catalogued as that of the Buddhists in India, China, or Tibet.

But though certain portions of Tibet, and particularly the capital (Lassa), are still inaccessible, at least to English travellers from India, other portions of it, and the countries between it and India, are becoming more and more frequented by adventurous tourists. It would therefore hardly be safe to appeal any longer to unknown Mahâtmas, or to the monks of Tibetan monasteries, for wild statements about Buddhism, esoteric or otherwise, for a letter addressed to these monasteries, or to English officials in the neighbourhood, would at once bring every information that could be desired. Where detection was so easy, it is almost impossible to believe that a Russian traveller, M. Notovitch, who has lately published a 'Life of Christ' dictated to him by Buddhist priests in the Himis Monastery, near Leh, in Ladakh, should, as his critics maintain, have invented not only the whole of this *Vie inconnue de Jésus-Christ*, but the whole of his journey to Ladakh. It is no doubt unfortunate that M. Notovitch lost the photographs which he took on the way, but such a thing may happen, and if an author declares that he has travelled from Kashmir to Ladakh one can hardly summon courage to doubt his word. It is certainly strange that letters should have been received not only from missionaries, but lately from English officers also passing through Leh, who, after making careful inquiries on the spot, declare that no Russian gentleman of the name of Notovitch ever passed through Leh, and that no traveller with a broken leg was ever nursed in the monastery of Himis. But M. Notovitch may have travelled in disguise, and he will no doubt be able to prove through his publisher, M. Paul Ollendorf, how both the Moravian missionaries and the English officers were misinformed by the Buddhist priests of the monastery of Leh. The monastery of Himis has often been visited, and there is a very full description of it in the works of the brothers Schlagintweit on Tibet.

But, taking it for granted that M. Notovitch is a gentleman and not a liar, we cannot help thinking that the Buddhist monks of Ladakh and Tibet must be wags, who enjoy mystifying inquisitive travellers, and that M. Notovitch fell far too easy a victim to their jokes. Possibly, the same excuse may apply to Madame Blavatsky, who was fully convinced that her friends, the Mahâtmas of Tibet, sent her letters to Calcutta, not by post, but through the air, letters which she showed to her friends, and which were written, not on Mahâtmic paper and with Mahâtmic ink, but on English paper and

with English ink. Be that as it may, M. Notovitch is not the first traveller in the East to whom Brâhmans or Buddhists have supplied, for a consideration, the information and even the manuscripts which they were in search of. Wilford's case ought to have served as a warning, but we know it did not serve as a warning to M. Jacolliot when he published his *Bible dans l'Inde* from Sanskrit originals, supplied to him by learned Pandits at Chandranagor. Madame Blavatsky, if I remember rightly, never even pretended to have received Tibetan manuscripts, or, if she had, neither she nor Mr. Sinnet have ever seen fit to publish either the text or an English translation of these treasures.

But M. Notovitch, though he did not bring the manuscripts home, at all events saw them, and not pretending to a knowledge of Tibetan, had the Tibetan text translated by an interpreter, and has published seventy pages of it in French in his *Vie inconnue de Jésus-Christ*. He was evidently prepared for the discovery of a Life of Christ among the Buddhists. Similarities between Christianity and Buddhism have frequently been pointed out of late, and the idea that Christ was influenced by Buddhist doctrines has more than once been put forward by popular writers. The difficulty has hitherto been to discover any real historical channel through which Buddhism could have reached Palestine at the time of Christ. M. Notovitch thinks that the manuscript which he found at Himis explains the matter in the simplest way. There is no doubt, as he says, a gap in the life of Christ, say from his fifteenth to his twenty-ninth year. During that very time the new Life found in Tibet asserts that Christ was in India, that he studied Sanskrit and Pâli, that he read the Vedas and the Buddhist Canon, and then returned through Persia to Palestine to preach the Gospel. If we understand M. Notovitch rightly, this Life of Christ was taken down from the mouths of some Jewish merchants who came to India immediately after the Crucifixion (p. 237). It was written down in Pâli, the sacred language of Southern Buddhism; the scrolls were afterwards brought from India to Nepaul and Makhada (*quære* Magadha) about 200 A.D. (p. 236), and from Nepaul to Tibet, and are at present carefully preserved at Lassa. Tibetan translations of the Pâli text are found, he says, in various Buddhist monasteries, and, among the rest, at Himis. It is these Tibetan manuscripts which were translated at Himis for M. Notovitch while he was laid up in the monastery with a broken leg, and it is from these manuscripts that he has taken his new Life of Jesus Christ and published it in French, with an account of his travels. This volume, which has already passed through several editions in France, is soon to be translated into English.

There is a certain plausibility about all this. The language of Magadha, and of Southern Buddhism in general, was certainly Pâli, and Buddhism reached Tibet through Nepaul. But M. Notovitch ought to

have been somewhat startled and a little more sceptical when he was told that the Jewish merchants who arrived in India immediately after the Crucifixion knew not only what had happened to Christ in Palestine, but also what had happened to Jesus, or Issa, while he spent fifteen years of his life among the Brâhmans and Buddhists in India, learning Sanskrit and Pâli, and studying the Vedas and the Tripitaka. With all their cleverness the Buddhist monks would have found it hard to answer the question, how these Jewish merchants met the very people who had known Issa as a casual student of Sanskrit and Pâli in India —for India is a large term—and still more, how those who had known Issa as a simple student in India, saw at once that he was the same person who had been put to death under Pontius Pilate. Even his name was not quite the same. His name in India is said to have been *Issa*, very like the Arabic name *Îsâ'l Masîh*, Jesus, the Messiah, while, strange to say, the name of Pontius Pilate seems to have remained unchanged in its passage from Hebrew to Pâli, and from Pâli to Tibetan. We must remember that part of Tibet was converted to Mohammedanism. So much for the difficulty as to the first composition of the Life of Issa in Pâli, the joint work of Jewish merchants and the personal friends of Christ in India, whether in Sind or at Benares. Still greater, however, is the difficulty of the Tibetan translation of that Life having been preserved for so many centuries without ever being mentioned. If M. Notovitch had been better acquainted with the Buddhist literature of Tibet and China, he would never have allowed his Buddhist hosts to tell him that this Life of Jesus was well known in Tibetan literature, though read by the learned only. We possess excellent catalogues of manuscripts and books of the Buddhists in Tibet and in China. A complete catalogue of the Tripitaka or the Buddhist Canon in Chinese has been translated into English by a pupil of mine, the Rev. Bunyiu Nanjio, M.A., and published by the Clarendon Press in 1883. It contains no less than 1,662 entries. The Tibetan Catalogue is likewise a most wonderful performance, and has been published in the *Asiatic Researches*, vol. xx., by Csoma Körösi, the famous Hungarian traveller, who spent years in the monasteries of Tibet and became an excellent Tibetan scholar. It has lately been republished by M. Féer in the *Annales du Musée Guimet*. This Catalogue is not confined to what we should call sacred or canonical books, it contains everything that was considered old and classical in Tibetan literature. There are two collections, the Kandjur and the Tandjur. The Kandjur consists of 108 large volumes, arranged in seven divisions:

1. Dulva, discipline (Vinaya).
2. Sherch'hin, wisdom (Pragnâpâramitâ).
3. P'hal-ch'hen, the garland of Buddhas (Buddha-avatansaka).
4. Kon-tségs, mountain of treasures (Ratnakûta).
5. Mdo, or Sûtras, aphorisms (Sûtrânta).

6. Myang-Hdas, or final emancipation (Nirvâna).
7. Gyut, Tantra or mysticism (Tantra).

The Tandjur consists of 225 volumes, and while the Kandjur is supposed to contain the Word of Buddha, the Tandjur contains many books on grammar, philosophy, &c., which, though recognised as part of the Canon, are in no sense sacred.

In the Tandjur, therefore, if not in the Kandjur, the story of Issa ought to have its place, and if M. Notovitch had asked his Tibetan friends to give him at least a reference to that part of the Catalogue where this story might be found, he would at once have discovered that they were trying to dupe him. Two things in their account are impossible, or next to impossible. The first, that the Jews from Palestine who came to India in about 35 A.D. should have met the very people who had known Issa when he was a student at Benares; the second, that this Sûtra of Issa, composed in the first century of our era, should not have found a place either in the Kandjur or in the Tandjur.

It might, of course, be said, Why should the Buddhist monks of Himis have indulged in this mystification?—but we know as a fact that Pandits in India, when hard pressed, have allowed themselves the same liberty with such men as Wilford and Jacolliot; why should not the Buddhist monks of Himis have done the same for M. Notovitch, who was determined to find a Life of Jesus Christ in Tibet? If this explanation, the only one I can think of, be rejected, nothing would remain but to accuse M. Notovitch, not simply of a *mauvaise plaisanterie*, but of a disgraceful fraud; and that seems a strong measure to adopt towards a gentleman who represents himself as on friendly terms with Cardinal Rotelli, M. Jules Simon, and E. Renan.

And here I must say that if there is anything that might cause misgivings in our mind as to M. Notovitch's trustworthiness, it is the way in which he speaks of his friends. When a Cardinal at Rome dissuades him from publishing his book, and also kindly offers to assist him, he hints that this was simply a bribe, and that the Cardinal wished to suppress the book. Why should he? If the story of Issa were historically true, it would remove many difficulties. It would show once for all that Jesus was a real and historical character. The teaching ascribed to him in Tibet is much the same as what is found in the Gospels, and if there are some differences, if more particularly the miraculous element is almost entirely absent, a Cardinal of the Roman Catholic Church would always have the tradition of the Church to rest on, and would probably have been most grateful for the solid historical framework supplied by the Tibetan Life.

M. Notovitch is equally uncharitable in imputing motives to the late M. Renan, who seems to have received him most kindly and to have offered to submit his discovery to the Academy. M. Notovitch

says that he never called on Renan again, but actually waited for his death, because he was sure that M. Renan would have secured the best part of the credit for himself, leaving to M. Notovitch nothing but the good luck of having discovered the Tibetan manuscript at Himis. Whatever else Renan was, he certainly was far from jealous, and he would have acted towards M. Notovitch in the same spirit with which he welcomed the discoveries which Hamdy Bey lately made in Syria on the very ground which had been explored before by Renan himself. Many travellers who discover manuscripts, or inscriptions, or antiquities, are too apt to forget how much they owe to good luck and to the spades of their labourers, and that, though a man who disinters a buried city may be congratulated on his devotion and courage and perseverance, he does not thereby become a scholar or antiquary. The name of the discoverer of the Rosetta stone is almost forgotten, the name of the decipherer will be remembered for ever.

The worst treatment, however, is meted out to the missionaries in Tibet. It seems that they have written to say that M. Notovitch had never broken his leg or been nursed in the monastery of Himis. This is a point that can easily be cleared up, for there are at the present moment a number of English officers at Leh, and there is the doctor who either did or did not set the traveller's leg. M. Notovitch hints that the Moravian missionaries at Leh are distrusted by the people, and that the monks would never have shown them the manuscript containing the Life of Issa. Again I say, why not? If Issa was Jesus Christ, either the Buddhist monks and the Moravian missionaries would have seen that they both believed in the same teacher, or they might have thought that this new Life of Issa was even less exposed to objections than the Gospel story. But the worst comes at the end. 'How can I tell,' he writes, 'that these missionaries have not themselves taken away the documents of which I saw the copies at the Himis monastery?' But how could they, if the monks never showed them these manuscripts? M. Notovitch goes even further. 'This is simply a supposition of my own,' he writes, 'but, if it is true, only the copies have been made to disappear, and the originals have remained at Lassa. . . . I propose to start at the end of the present year for Tibet, in order to find the original documents having reference to the life of Jesus Christ. I hope to succeed in this undertaking in spite of the wishes of the missionaries, for whom, however, I have never ceased to profess the profoundest respect.' Any one who can hint that these missionaries may have stolen and suppressed the only historical Life of Christ which is known to exist, and nevertheless express the profoundest respect for them, must not be surprised if the missionaries and their friends retaliate in the same spirit. We still prefer to suppose that M. Notovitch, like Lieutenant Wilford, like M. Jacolliot, like Madame Blavatsky and Mr. Sinnet, was duped.

It is pleasanter to believe that Buddhist monks can at times be wags, than that M. Notovitch is a rogue.

All this, no doubt, is very sad. How long have we wished for a real historical life of Christ without the legendary halo, written, not by one of his disciples, but by an independent eye-witness who had seen and heard Christ during the three years of his active life, and who had witnessed the Crucifixion and whatever happened afterwards? And now, when we seemed to have found such a Life, written by an eye-witness of his death, and free as yet from any miraculous accretions, it turns out to be an invention of a Buddhist monk at Himis, or, as others would have it, a fraud committed by an enterprising traveller and a bold French publisher. We must not lose patience. In these days of unexpected discoveries in Egypt and elsewhere, everything is possible. There is now at Vienna a fragment of the Gospel-story more ancient than the text of St. Mark. Other things may follow. Only let us hope that if such a Life were ever to be discovered, the attitude of Christian theologians would not be like that which M. Notovitch suspects on the part of an Italian Cardinal or of the Moravian missionaries at Himis, but that the historical Christ, though different from the Christ of the Gospels, would be welcomed by all who can believe in his teaching, even without the help of miracles.

F. MAX MÜLLER.

P.S.—It is curious that at the very time I was writing this paper I received a letter from an English lady dated Leh, Ladakh, June 29. She writes:

> We left Leh two days ago, having enjoyed our stay there so much! There had been only one English lady here for over three years. Two German ladies live there, missionaries, a Mr. and Mrs. Weber—a girl, and another English missionary. They have only twenty Christians, though it has been a mission-station for seven years. We saw a polo match which was played down the principal street. Yesterday we were at the great Himis monastery, the largest Buddhist monastery up here—800 Lamas. Did you hear of a Russian who could not gain admittance to the monastery in any way, but at last broke his leg outside, and was taken in? His object was to copy a Buddhist Life of Christ which is there. He says he got it, and has published it since in French. There is not a single word of truth in the whole story! There has been no Russian there. No one has been taken into the Seminary for the past fifty years with a broken leg! There is no Life of Christ there at all! It is dawning on me that people who in England profess to have been living in Buddhist monasteries in Tibet and to have learnt there the mysteries of *Esoteric Buddhism* are frauds. The monasteries one and all are the most filthy places. The Lamas are the dirtiest of a very dirty race. They are fearfully ignorant, and idolaters *pur et simple*; no—neither pure nor simple. I have asked many travellers whom I have met, and they all tell the same story. They acknowledge that perhaps at the Lama University at Lassa it may be better, but no Englishman is allowed there. Captain Bower (the discoverer of the famous Bower MS.) did his very best to get there, but failed. . . . We are roughing it

now very much. I have not tasted bread for five weeks, and shall not for two months more. We have 'chappaties' instead. We rarely get any butter. We carry a little tinned butter, but it is too precious to eat much of. It was a great luxury to get some linen washed in Leh, though they did starch the sheets. We are just starting on our 500 miles march to Simla. We hear that one pass is not open yet, about which we are very anxious. We have one pass of 18,000 feet to cross, and we shall be 13,000 feet high for over a fortnight; but I hope that by the time you get this we shall be down in beautiful Kulu, only one month from Simla!